

Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission Draft Meeting Minutes

Friday, March 25th, 2022

9:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Meeting held remotely via Zoom and YouTube livestream

COMMISSION MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Member Name	Member Role	Organization	Attendance
Jill Gaebler	Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments	City of Colorado Springs	Yes
Chris Wiseman	Pueblo Area Council of Governments	Pueblo County	No
Becky Karasko	North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization	NFRMPO	Yes
Rick Klein	Resident of Huerfano, Las Animas, Otero, or Pueblo Counties	City of La Junta	Yes
Sal Pace – Vice Chair	Passenger Rail Advocate	Resident of Colorado Springs	Yes
DJ Mitchell	Class 1 Railroad Representative	BNSF Railway	Yes
Nathan Anderson	Class 1 Railroad Representative	Union Pacific	No
Phil Rico	South Central Council of Governments	Mayor of Trinidad	Yes
Jacob Riger	Denver Regional Council of Governments	DRCOG	Yes
Jim Souby – Chair	Passenger Rail Advocate	ColoRail	Yes
Bill Van Meter	Regional Transportation District	RTD	No
Vacant	Colorado Department of Transportation	CDOT	
Rob Eaton*	Amtrak	Amtrak	No
Dale Steenbergen*	Cheyenne, Wyoming	Chamber of Commerce	No

*Non-Voting Members

New District Board Members:

Dennis Flores (PACOG), Will Karspeck (NFRMPO), Luis Lopez (SCCOG), Debra Johnson (RTD), Deborah Mulvey (DRCOG), Julie Mulica (DRCOG), Chris Nevitt (DRCOG), Randy Wheelock (I-70 Mountain Corridor Coalition)

A. Call to Order and Introductions – Jim Souby

Jim Souby called the meeting to order at 9:30 am. The current Commission members and newly appointed District members introduced themselves.

B. Public Comment Period – Public

A Front Range resident expressed excitement for FRPR and stated that the project will be transformative for the corridor. He hopes the preliminary SDP provides a path to work collaboratively with Class I Railroads in the near term and hopes that Amtrak's plan for three trains a day is a nonstarter. The resident commented that high frequency, around 10 trips per day, is essential to any passenger rail success and that there is great potential along the Front Range. They thanked all those working on this.

C. Congressional Conversation

Rep. Joe Neguse, from Colorado's 2nd District, began the conversation. Rep. Neguse thanked the Commission for the invitation to speak and for their service on the Board. Rep. Neguse worked to pass the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act and expressed that FRPR is one of the most exciting endeavors of the state in a long time. Rep. Neguse spoke on FRA's creation of a corridor identification and development plan and said that FRA will issue further guidance by May. There will be solicitation for proposals later this year. Rep. Neguse emphasized that his office is willing to support and advocate for grant opportunities for FRPR and help make it a reality. Jim Souby asked about Congress's reauthorization of Amtrak. Rep. Neguse said that he would like to think that this is a paradigm shift but cautioned Congress's ability to keep making large investments. Congress is now working on the budget for the next fiscal year. Jim Souby asked how the Commission can help in Washington, D.C. Rep. Neguse said that advocacy is valuable and the Commission needs to keep doing the work it is doing now. Mayor Phil Rico commented that it is important for the new District to utilize as much federal funding to lessen the tax burden on citizens. Rep. Neguse reassured that the economic benefits of FRPR will not only benefit Colorado towns but will rebound and impact multiple states.

Kari Linker, the Eastern Plains Regional Director with the Office of Senator Hickenlooper, thanked the Board for having her on the Congressional panel. Kari introduced her Southern Regional counterpart, Antonio Huerta. Antonio mentioned the Amache site in Southern Colorado and expressed gratitude for the work being done on that and along the Front Range. He addressed the importance of the infrastructure bill and that their office is making sure that money gets to where it is needed the most regarding climate initiatives. Antonio disclosed that FRA and USDOT continue to implement aspects of IIJA and the transportation updates can be found at build.gov. The Hickenlooper Office has version of the IIJA packet giving a high-level overview specific to Colorado and can be shared with the group.

Renee Martinez from Senator Bennet's office spoke last. Renee serves Southeastern and Southern Colorado. Senator Bennet has been a supporter of passenger rail including the Southwest Chief and the Winter Park Ski Train. Rep. Martinez said that their office is ready to assist with grant applications and letters of support for FRPR especially having seen the increased the amount of funding available with IIJA. Jim Souby told Renee that Senator Bennet was incredibly helpful as an advocate for the Winter Park Ski Train and the Commission is looking forward to his support for Front Range Rail.

D. Review/Approval of February 25th Draft Commission Meeting Minutes – Jim Souby

Mayor Phil Rico made a motion to approve the February 25th Draft Commission Meeting Minutes. Rick Klein and DJ Mitchell seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously. Mayor Phil Rico also asked about obtaining clearer images on the Rail Commission Final Report. Spencer Dodge confirmed that the file is in the process of being finalized and will be sent out soon.

E. Staff Report – Spencer Dodge

Spencer Dodge gave the staff report. Spencer stated that the Rail Commission has been focused on the District transition including facilitation procurement and substantiating the scope of work. Spencer is monitoring and assisting with the appointee process from COGs, MPOs, and Governor's nominees. The next step is to schedule Senate confirmation hearings. Spencer brought up FRA's corridor identification and development program. The FRPR team submitted their comments and answers to ensure that the project is eligible for funding and that FRPR is a priority for FRA and USDOT. The team continues to work on the SWC Thru-Car Analysis and CRISI 2020 SDP. The team is working on technical projects as well as general grant administration and procurement. The transition facilitation contract is now reflected in the financial report. This financial segment will look different next month for the incoming Board.

Jim Souby mentioned that the Senate Bill appropriation goes to the new District Board and that the Commission is working with CDOT to make sure that everything is in order for the new District. Spencer confirmed with CDOT's legislative liaison that the appropriation is still moving along, and the funding is secure. Mayor Phil Rico asked about edits to the onboarding packet. Spencer confirmed that the updates were made last week and the packet was sent out to the Commission and District members.

F. Southwest Chief

2019 CRISI Grant: Thru-Car Alternatives Analysis Update – Spencer Dodge

Spencer Dodge provided an update on the Southwest Chief Thru-Car Service Alternatives Analysis. Spencer reminded the Commission that this is an FRA funded project to bring the SWC north. The stakeholder engagement plan was sent out and the team is looking into setting up regional coalitions. The methodology report is now with FRA for review. Jim Souby commented that this grant was initially to reroute FRPR to connect to the Southwest Chief to increase ridership significantly. Jim stated that issues with PTC among some others made this project more complex and the team now needs to look at alternatives such as a thru-car extension. Mayor Phil Rico added that this project will benefit visitors from both east and west.

G. Front Range Passenger Rail

2020 CRISI Grant: Preliminary SDP and Alternatives Analysis – Spencer Dodge

Spencer provided an update on the Service Development Plan. The team is focusing on meeting the requirements outlined in SB 238 and by the FRA. The RPF was published in the last month and proposals were due yesterday. Over the next month, the team will be working to select a consultant. Jim Souby added that this is both a federal and legislative requirement; it is essential to meet these requirements before the District can move forward with a ballot measure.

H. Other Items

April 22nd Joint Meeting – Spencer Dodge

Spencer reminded the group that the April 22nd Commission meeting will be a joint meeting as a kick-off to the new District Board meetings and sunset to the Rail Commission meetings. It will be an opportunity to exchange ideas, ask and answer questions, and transfer as much institutional knowledge as possible. Spencer stated that more information for the new District members will roll out in the next month to ensure that they are well adjusted and ready to take on new challenges. Phil Rico suggested including all the acronyms in onboarding materials to help the Board members transition.

I. Confirm Next/Future Meetings

The next Rail Commission meeting is on Friday, April 22nd from 9:30 – 11:30 am, time subject to change.

Rick Klein said that he is unable to attend the next meeting and expressed his gratitude for the Commission; to the new District members he expressed excitement and advised that they all hold each other accountable in doing their parts. Mayor Phil Rico commented on his positive experience and wished the new members well. Chris Nevitt thanked the Commission for all their hard work and doing the heavy lifting to enable the District to achieve something great.

J. Adjourn

Jim Souby adjourned the meeting at 10:25 am.